



# Indiana State Department of Health

## Epidemiology Resource Center

### Quick Facts

#### About...Hepatitis C

##### What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a contagious liver disease caused by the Hepatitis C virus (HCV). Hepatitis C can be acute or chronic. An acute infection is a short-term illness which occurs in the first 6 months after being exposed to the virus. A chronic infection is a long-term illness that occurs when the virus remains in a person's body. Chronic infections may progress over years, even decades, and can lead to cirrhosis (liver scarring), liver cancer, and liver failure. It is the most common blood-borne disease in the United States and the leading cause of liver transplantation. An estimated 4.1 million people in America have the disease. Each year, about 17,000 Americans become infected with the Hepatitis C.

In 2010, the most current year of data for Indiana, 27 cases of acute Hepatitis C and 5,927 cases of chronic Hepatitis C were reported. To see the complete 2010 Report on Hepatitis C, refer to <http://www.in.gov/isdh/20667.htm>

##### How is Hepatitis C spread?

Hepatitis C is spread mainly by direct contact with human blood. It is not spread by touching or sharing eating and drinking utensils. You may have been exposed to Hepatitis C if:

- You have ever shared needles to inject street drugs or other drugs. The way the drugs were prepared may have been contaminated with blood.
- You received blood, blood products, or solid organ transplants before 1992.
- You ever received long-term kidney dialysis.
- You were ever a health care worker who had frequent contact with blood or had a needle stick injury.
- Your mother had Hepatitis C at the time she gave birth to you. During birth, her blood may have gotten into your body.
- You ever shared items, such as razors or toothbrush, with

- someone who had Hepatitis C.
- You ever had unprotected sex with someone who had Hepatitis C.
- You ever received a tattoo from a facility that may have used dirty needles or had poor sanitary practices.

### **Who is at risk for Hepatitis C?**

- Injection drug users
- Healthcare workers
- People who have multiple sex partners
- Homeless people (risk of drug use, poor hygiene, poor nutrition, and unsafe living conditions)
- Military veterans who served in the Vietnam War era and those who have participated in high risk behaviors such as drug use and unsafe tattooing

### **How do I know if I have Hepatitis C?**

Blood tests can detect whether you have Hepatitis C. Also, your health care provider may suggest that you be tested for Hepatitis C based on your symptoms (if any) and any risk factors you may have.

### **What are the symptoms of Hepatitis C?**

Symptoms may include:

- Jaundice (yellowing of skin or eyes)
- Dark urine
- Stomach pain
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fever
- Tiredness
- Headache

Symptoms usually appear 2 weeks to 6 months after being exposed; though, most people (as many as 80%) have no symptoms or very mild symptoms. It is important to keep in mind that people without symptoms can still infect others. About 85 percent of people who become infected with Hepatitis C will become chronic (long-term) carriers.

### **How can Hepatitis C be treated?**

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved treatments that include interferon or a combination therapy of ribavarin and interferon as the most current standard of treatment. Your health care provider will decide which treatment options are best for you.

## **How is Hepatitis C prevented?**

While there are many ways you can be exposed to the Hepatitis C virus, here are five ways to avoid it:

- Don't use injection drugs
- Don't share a toothbrush
- Don't share razors
- Use a condom
- Use licensed tattoo and piercing studios

Currently, there is no vaccine for Hepatitis C. If you have Hepatitis C, you should be vaccinated against Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B to prevent those infections.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/index.htm> and <http://www.hcvadvocate.org/>

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